

Mayor's Business Lunch stresses need for partnerships and coordination

By Bill Rea

Food was very prominent at the recent Mayor's Business Lunch, held in Bolton.

There was plenty of great food, the results of the efforts of culinary students at the local high schools. And there was also a lively panel discussion on the local food industry.

Mayor Allan Thompson stressed the partnership that was involved in the event, including the 'amazing' group of young people who were showing their passion for the culinary arts.

'This is what Caledon's about,' he said.

He also pointed out food is a big part of industry in Caledon, and one that has not yet been recognized.

'We've got a really huge, growing economy here,' he declared.

Having places to dine out is part of that, Thompson observed. He added Caledon has good breweries, cideries and wineries, which all help compliment what's already in place.

'We need to tap into the markets that we have,' he said, pointing out there are some eight million people living in reach of Caledon, which can be capitalized on. 'It's right there at our doorstep. Let's not lose that opportunity.'

'You don't have to go to Toronto for a good meal,' he added. 'You can find it anywhere in Caledon.'

Laura Johnston, executive director of strategic initiatives for the Town, moderated the panel discussion, which dealt with how partnerships feed innovation, support entrepreneurialism and help build the local economy.

'Farming's changed,' commented Tom Wilson of Spirit Tree Estate Cidery.

He said they started the cidery from scratch, beginning with a new orchard. He added they 'went through some hoops and red tape.' The cidery opened in September 2009, at a time when the cider trade was just taking off. The growth has continued, but he said there's no industry to boost it.

There are a handful of cideries in Ontario, and Wilson said a couple of years ago, a chef in Burlington hosted dinners featuring cider masters, so they all got to know each other.

They founded the Ontario Craft Cider Association (OCCA), of which he's currently chair.

Wilson pointed out there's a small wine industry in Ontario, and craft breweries have been running about 15 years. They both get tax breaks on their products, but not cideries.

'We're the ones left in the back,' he remarked, adding there's almost \$2 of taxes and mark-up on a bottle of cider, and it all goes to government. OCCA 'is working to change that. Wilson added Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones has been helpful in that regard, putting forth a private member's bill to get the same breaks enjoyed by breweries and wineries.

Katie Carolan is a young entrepreneur who runs a chicken farm on the border between Caledon and Mono.

She said she doesn't come from a farm family, but her mother did have a passion for agriculture. They used to spend a lot of weekends getting vegetables from local farms, and she started working part-time on farms.

'But it was never kind of what I really wanted to do,' she said.

She attended Westside Secondary School in Orangeville where she started realizing there was a need for local food. The school cafeteria would have had access to local food, but there didn't seem to be a connection.

Carolan said she made it her goal to teach her generation about local food.

'It wasn't as easy as I thought it was going to be,' she remarked.

She said Chicken Farmers of Ontario told her she could raise 3,000 birds, but she started with 1,500, and her father helped her out financially.

She also learned there are a lot of grants and business programs available, and she started looking into them. Carolan also started spending time working at farmer's markets, surrounded by people who were starting up small businesses of their own, so she started picking brains.

'Everyone has knowledge I could obtain,' she said, adding she also found out there were a lot of supports available for young entrepreneurs. 'You just had to ask and tell them what you were doing.'

Chef Jason Taylor of Taylor'd for Taste said he's been in the business as a personal chef for 11 years.

'I come to your house and cook for you,' he said.

He added getting out in the community and being involved with people is the best way to get the word about his business out there. He also said being six foot six helps him stand out.

Taylor said he's learned that 'community partnerships is about giving back,' and that includes getting out and supporting local

farmers and agriculture.

He also observed that people appreciate what's being done.

Taylor recently helped resurrect the Palgrave Community Dinner which fed about 330 people. He said they got help from the culinary students at St. Michael Catholic Secondary School when it came to carving the turkeys.

‘It’s all about giving back,’ he said. ‘That’s what I’ve noticed about community partnerships.’

The questions from the floor included delving in to whether the municipality could do a better job when it comes to serving the needs of business.

Wilson said it took him three years to get a building permit.

‘When you’re thinking outside of the box, it definitely scares planners and building people,’ he remarked.

He added there was miscommunication and duplication between agencies.

‘We finally pushed it through,’ he said, adding it looks like the Town has recognized these problems.

Carolan said she had not run into problems like that, but she could be heading toward them.

She also said educational workshops on the topic tell people about the rules and what they’re getting into. That type of education has to increase.

Taylor said he was lucky.

‘I don’t have to go to government very much,’ he commented.

He also pointed to the need to teach people to cook.



There was nothing wrong with the food at the recent Mayor’s Business Lunch. Students from the various high schools in town pooled their culinary skills. These students from St. Michael Catholic Secondary School were working on home-made ricotta, drizzled with olive oil and thyme. Mayor Allan Thompson stepped in to help along the serving line.



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Laura Johnston, executive director of strategic initiatives for the Town, moderated the panel discussion with Tom Wilson of Spirit Tree Estate Cidery, youth entrepreneur Katie Carolan and Chef Jason Taylor of Taylor'd for Taste.